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Kennedy Being Measured Against Own Campaign Idea of 'Strong' President

Executive-Centered, Adviser-Task Force System
With Overlapping Jurisdictions Cited as Slowing
Decisions—White House Making New Efforts to
Communicate Its Programs and Plans to People.

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LOCAL EVIDENCE is piling up that the nebulous group known as the "Washington community" is questioning whether President Kennedy will be the "strong" chief executive he described as desirable in his campaign and as he appeared to be in the early months of his administration.

The high personal popularity of Mr. Kennedy and his family throughout the nation as reported by the Gallup Poll, does not reflect the apparent confusion in the city of Washington, where the trees often hide the far boundaries of the forest. Former President Eisenhower enjoyed similar nation-wide popularity while capital residents were skeptical of his abilities as a leader. In his administration, the only indications that Washington doubt about his uses of presidential power had spread throughout the country were Republican defeats in congressional elections. These indications may have been non sequiturs and not necessarily true. This leaves open whether Washington's present puzzlement will affect the 1962 congressional elections.

THE GREATER Washington community extends far beyond the limits of the District of Columbia. It was described by presidential adviser Richard E. Neustadt in his book "Presidential Power—The Politics of Leadership" in these words:

"This community cuts across the President's constituencies. Members of Congress and of his administration, governors of states, military commanders in the field, leading politicians of both parties, representatives of private organizations, news men of assorted types and sizes, foreign diplomats—and principals abroad—all these are 'Washingtonians' no matter what their physical location.

"In most respects the Washington community is far from homogeneous. In one respect it is tightly knit indeed: By definition all its members are compelled to watch the President for reasons not of pleasure but vocation. They need him in their business just as he needs them. Their own work thus requires that they keep an eye on him. Because they watch him closely his persuasiveness with them turns quite as much on their informed appraisals as on his presumed advantages."

Neustadt commented further:

"What these men think may or may not be 'true,' but it is the reality on which they act, at least until their calculations turn out wrong."

Aside from the elected officials and government appointees, the principal local members of the group are reporters and commentators for daily weekly and monthly publications and for radio and television; representatives of industrial, financial, agriculture and labor organizations, including the writers of "confidential" weekly "newsletters," and the intellectuals attached to various foundations and institutes. In a sense, these members are agents for the public and their parent organizations. The group members as a whole, according to Neustadt, are "opinion makers," and their influence extends from Washington throughout the nation and even overseas.

The recent complaints of the local representatives are about what they call the poor communications methods of the President and his subordinates and the difficulty of getting definite information about operations and plans. A common comment is that the White House has too many advisers and not enough officials who are willing to make decisions within what used to be regarded as their own jurisdictions.

In one of his first pre-convention campaign speeches, at the National Press Club in January 1960, Mr. Kennedy said the next President, whatever his political affiliation, "must open the channels of communication between the world of thought and the seat of power." He criticized the Eisenhower administration by quoting an old Chinese proverb: "There is a great deal of noise on the stairs but nobody comes into the room."

WASHINGTON news writers who have considered themselves the channels through which basic information has been distributed to the country and the world have wondered whether the Kennedy administration is trying to go over their heads to local opinion makers and mass audiences. At the start of his presidential tenure, Mr. Kennedy opened his press con-

ferences scheduled several at hours to get wide audiences. Recently he began a series of White House luncheons for publishers from selected states. The guests were invited to tell what was on their minds and to ask any questions they thought important.

Early next month, a dozen or more Cabinet officers, agency heads and White House officials will hold regional non-partisan conferences in 12 cities to discuss the Administration's program for urban affairs, full employment and economic growth and the problems and opportunities for youth and the elderly. The St. Louis sessions will be held Nov. 7 and 8 at Kiel Auditorium, with Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Abraham A. Ribicoff the principal speaker.

Although the Washington news writers may appear to be selfishly guarding what they consider their prerogative, the publishers' luncheons and the regional meetings indicate that the White House fears it is not getting its message across to the voters. News men observe that the Kennedy programs and plans would be better understood if the President and his top-level subordinates held more press conferences and, in the case of the latter, made themselves more available.

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